



Contact

A Newsletter for the Council of the North

Summer 2021

Responding to God's Call to mission and ministry in the northern regions of Canada



PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

L-R: Bishops Lucy Netser, Annie Ittoshat, and Joey Royal at their consecration on March 31, 2019

Radio brings Nunavut hamlet together during pandemic

By Matt Gardner

On Nov. 13, health authorities confirmed the first case of COVID-19 in Arviat, a predominantly Inuit hamlet in Nunavut with an estimated population of 2,850. The following months saw Arviat become by far Nunavut's worst-hit community, with 339 confirmed cases—more than two-thirds of all cases in the territory as of April 30.

Soon after the appearance of COVID-19, the hamlet imposed tight lockdown measures to control the spread of virus. An Anglican bishop, the Rt. Rev. Lucy Netser, contacted the local radio

committee to ask if she could bring her Christian message to the airwaves. The committee responded favourably, and other churches soon followed.

Today, Bishop Netser has a two-hour slot every Sunday on the local community radio station, Arviapaluk 96.5 FM. From 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., she offers morning worship, Scripture readings, and prayers and encouragement for the community. Other churches offer their own programs afterwards, with Arviat Alliance Church starting at 1 p.m., Glad Tidings Church at 3 p.m. and St. Therese Catholic Church at 5 p.m.

"In the Arctic, a lot of people go to church," Netser says. "When something like a pandemic is happening, that's when we really need to be there for each other and encourage each other and pray for each other."

Bishop Netser primarily uses the Inuktitut version of *The Book of Common Prayer* to lead prayers on the radio, since there is no Inuktitut translation of *The Book of Alternative Services*. She also prays for the communities and offers listeners a brief period of silence to pray on their own for people they might be concerned about.

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Bringing summer Bible camp home to families

By Matt Gardner

If kids can't go to Bible camp, the diocese of Caledonia will bring Bible camp to kids—and parents are welcome to join the fun.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit last year, the diocese realized it couldn't hold its annual summer program at Camp Caledonia, located at Tyhee Lake, B.C. Traditionally, the diocese has hired a student seminarian each summer to teach Bible stories and lead activities for campers.

Sending a seminarian to Camp Caledonia to lead virtual activities posed a challenge due to limited Internet access and poor cellphone connections. Instead, the diocese took a different approach with the help of partner On Eagle's Wings Ecumenical Ministries (OEW), which offers Christian education programs for remote northern communities. The diocese has previously incorporated parts of the OEW curriculum into its summer Bible program.

In response to the pandemic, OEW turned its curriculum from an in-person program to one that could be done by families at home—using kits in backpacks that give the program its name, Bible Camp in a Bag. The diocese of Caledonia seized the opportunity and held its first backyard Bible camps in 2020, a trend that will continue this summer.

"What we're trying to do with this is to actually engage parents in the Bible story along with their children so that the parents are learning alongside the children," says the Rev. Lesley Hand, Anglican priest and executive director of On Eagle's Wings.



PHOTO: ON EAGLE'S WINGS

Volunteers help assemble kits for Bible Camp in a Bag.

"Often they don't realize they are because they're just having fun, teaching their kids. But they're also hearing and engaging with the Bible story."

Bible Camp in a Bag takes the regular five-day Bible camp curriculum—led in pre-pandemic times by an OEW team going into a community—and converts it into home programs that provide enough content for three weeks of activity.

Each child or family receives a backpack with five different kits inside. Each kit contains a booklet with prayers, a Bible story, a note for parents on how to work through activities with

children, and instructions and materials for making crafts. A memory stick or DVD features OEW volunteers who lead participants in making crafts, telling Bible stories and singing songs.

One of the benefits of bringing of the camp experience home, Hand notes, is that parents can experience the same "basic level of Christian education alongside their children."

"What we experience in a traditional Bible camp setting where there's a team that goes into a community is that parents tend to drop the children off

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THE COUNCIL OF THE NORTH is a grouping of financially assisted dioceses, supported through grants by General Synod, that serve sparsely populated areas in the Arctic, Yukon, Northern and Central Interior British Columbia, Alberta, northern Saskatchewan, Manitoba; and northern Ontario.

Specifically:

• Diocese of the Arctic • Diocese of Athabasca • Diocese of Brandon • Diocese of Caledonia • Indigenous Spiritual Ministry of Mishamikoweesh • Diocese of Moosonee • Diocese of Saskatchewan • Territory of the People • Diocese of Yukon •



Some of the items found in Bible Camp in a Bag kits

PHOTO COLLAGE

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and come and pick them up three hours later,” Hand says. “Because COVID has made us adapt to a virtual environment, we decided that we would structure it in such a way that we can actually engage those parents.”

The Rt. Rev. David Lehmann, Bishop of Caledonia, one of the founding board members of OEW, has used the ecumenical group’s material in his parishes since the late 1990s. After becoming bishop in 2018, he incorporated parts of the OEW curriculum into the diocesan program at Camp Caledonia.

“When I became bishop, I realized the summer campers [were] creating their own summer program from scratch,” Lehmann says. “We were hiring people and they were trying to come up with a curriculum and all I thought was, why re-create the wheel?”

“Because the bulk of the people attending our summer camp are

Indigenous, a northern-Canadian-designed program made far more sense in my mind,” he adds.

The partnership between the diocese of Caledonia and OEW greatly expanded during the pandemic. Unable to host their in-person Bible camp, the diocese took advantage of the backyard Bible camp kits that teams of OEW volunteers put together.

“They count out the markers and cut the length of yarn that they need and count out the paper plates that they need,” Hand says, “This is a whole crew of volunteers that love this ministry and love the north and love the Lord, and that’s their motivation to do this.”

It was July last year by the time the diocese of Caledonia received its Bible camp kits and was able to distribute them to families, “just because we were shifting gears and then we had to learn a bunch of technology,” Lehmann says.

The first backyard Bible camp was

built around the theme “Christ loves all people” and proved a hit among Anglican families. Lehmann says that the kits were “very much appreciated.”

“Kids [were] tearing into stuff ... They didn’t need the videos to do the crafts,” he recalls. “Most of the kids just looked at the [instruction] sheets and got into it. I dropped some off to one family myself and stood back and was just amazed at watching the kids get excited and engage in the stories—and the parents appreciating the fact that we couldn’t get together [in person], but we had a resource for them.”

The theme of this year’s camp is “Living in God’s house together.” Lehman hopes the experience will help parents and children to “step out of the regular routine that’s been happening and to engage in some Bible story, do some crafts and some activities ... to think about how God connects us all in this and that God is with us in this pandemic.” ☪

Mentoring new clergy in the Diocese of Moosonee during a Pandemic

By the Rev. Diane Hilpert McIlroy
Mentor for Clergy and Spiritual guidance,
Diocese of Moosonee

2020 was a year that most of us will not soon forget. We were separated from our families, friends, neighbours, schools, jobs, and churches. The global pandemic changed most of what we call “normal.” Many people began to rely on the Internet for shopping, socializing, working, and even worshipping. Before the pandemic began, although I am retired, I had been doing some supply work, but obviously, with churches closed, supply clergy were not needed. After a few months of lockdown I began to question what God might be asking of me. Early one morning I prayed that Jesus would reveal God’s plan to me. That very evening I received an email from Archbishop Anne Germond asking me to prayerfully consider the position of mentor in the Diocese of Moosonee.

Archbishop Anne and assisting Archbishop Fred Hiltz were looking for a new and inventive way of engaging their clergy in continued learning. I was invited to mentor the clergy who had graduated from the Moosonee School of Ministry and to be a spiritual support and confidante to the other clergy in the diocese. There wasn’t a ministry description per se, but the focus was on mentoring newer clergy in preaching, liturgy, and Anglicanism.

I was confident that this was going to be a learning curve for me. The first item on the learning list was conquering technology. Thankfully, Zoom is easy—and after sending out a Zoom invitation with the wrong date, I learned to connect with clergy all over Moosonee. Most of the clergy from the Moosonee School of Ministry have participated in weekly Zoom sessions, daily phone conversations, emails, and texts.

The Zoom sessions on preaching focused on Paul Scott Wilson’s *The Four Pages of the Sermon*. We had conversations and demonstrations on how the Episcopalian priest, professor, and author Barbara Brown Taylor



PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

The Rev. Diane Hilpert McIlroy (R) with Archbishop Anne Germond

preached and how the Presbyterian author and professor Rev. Dr. Tom Long preaches. And lastly, we looked at how Phyllis Tickle and Fredrick Buechner “tell the story in today’s language,” keeping true to the text. This way of preaching is a powerful way of putting people into the story with Jesus.

To study Anglicanism, we concentrated on a general view of the Anglican Church in Canada. Many of us are taking the Anglican Origins course out of the Diocese of Montreal, which is giving us an overview of the history of the Anglican Church. When this course ends we are planning to join with the people from Henry Budd College, where the Indigenous clergy and students will discuss how Anglicanism has affected them as First Nations people. Moosonee is well represented, with about a dozen people taking the course.

The teaching has been reciprocal. We have shared resources for funerals and baptism rites, the church seasons, and feast days within the church. The liturgy sessions will be based on the work of several people, including Nora Gallagher’s *The Sacred Meal*, *Let Us Give Thanks* by David Holeyton, Catherine

Hall, and Gregory Kerr-Wilson, and others that are listed at the end of this article. After each session, notes are sent to the participants.

We were blessed to have Rev. Norm Wesley teach us about the shaking tent. Some of the experienced clergy are interested in having at least one Zoom session on moving forward after the pandemic in the “new normal.” There are many exciting possibilities for us, but we also know there will be issues. Working together as colleagues in ministry is a strong and powerful way for equipping one another to build Christ’s Church, here in Moosonee, well into the future.

Our Zoom sessions begin with a short devotional service and/or a prayer, and end with prayers. Over the months that we have been together, there have been all kinds of questions, as well as enlightening and lively conversations. The clergy in Moosonee who take part have a deep desire to continue to grow and learn. We keep in touch between Zoom sessions, and we have built caring and supportive relationships with one another. I have been blessed to meet some amazing, deeply devoted Christian

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Hymns are a mainstay of the program, with Netser often inviting guests on the air to perform them.

"Sometimes I call them ahead of time [to see] if they can sing on the radio," Netser says. "A lot of people are musical in this community. They sometimes sing over the phone, sometimes more than one person in a house."

Most weeks, Netser delivers a sermon on her Sunday show. But sometimes she invites guests from within the community or out of town to deliver sermons, such as retired Anglican bishop Andrew Atagotaaluk. Guests will call at a certain time in order to speak on the radio.

Netser says Arviat residents responded positively to the on-air prayers, sermons and hymns.

"They really liked it," she says. "I'd say we reach more people that way. Some people don't really like going to the church, but at home, they can have a prayer at home with their family."

She adds, "Sometimes, parents call me afterwards saying that they really enjoyed the radio show today, because 'my children were listening with me and praying with me.' Some little kids started knowing my voice, who I was, so that was kinda cute."

Besides church programs on Sundays, Arviaqpaluk offers a range of other radio programs throughout the week, with each business or community organization given an equal two-hour slot. Mondays include cultural programs. Thursdays provide updates from the health centre. On Fridays listeners can call in to a show focusing on mental health. Content is in a mix of Inuktitut and English—the former being the predominant language in Arviat.

Station manager Laura Tassiuk says that community radio has been "very important" in bringing people together during the pandemic, helping residents "be cautious and be careful, and to keep everybody informed so we'll all be on the same page."

She also acknowledges the support

"Sometimes, parents call me afterwards saying that they really enjoyed the radio show today, because 'my children were listening with me and praying with me.' Some little kids started knowing my voice, who I was, so that was kinda cute."

—Bishop Lucy Nester

that community programs can offer for people isolated during the pandemic. "I think it keeps everybody calm and sane," Tassiuk says.

"Every day is different, I think," she adds. "We're managing. We're surviving, one day at a time."

In recent weeks, the situation has improved dramatically. Arviat's fight against the coronavirus saw a major victory on April 20, when residents marked two weeks since the last person in the community came out of isolation. Many locals celebrated the end of the outbreak with a parade of vehicles in the streets.

Netser is unsure whether Arviaqpaluk radio will remain as active after the pandemic. But she hopes that residents gained encouragement and hope from listening during the peak of the outbreak—and a knowledge that even the hardest times will pass.

"There've been pandemics before and that has passed, and it's going to be like that again," Netser says. She compares the experience of the pandemic to stormy seas that eventually calm, or the aftermath of an earthquake.

"After the earthquake tremors, then there's peace," the bishop says. "It's like that still ...Ω"

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people in this vast and beautiful diocese.

Originally, I was to mentor and teach, but over the weeks and months, we have all learned so much from one another. I am grateful for the ways everyone is willing to share their ministry experiences and advice. It is a privilege to walk the good road with clergy in Moosonee, and I am excited to see what God is going to do in Moosonee next. Ω

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The Rt. Rev. David Lehmann, Chair
Email: bishop@caledoniaanglican.ca

For all communications inquiries or to share your stories or experiences about positive ministry projects in the North, please email the editor, Brian Bukowski at cnc@national.anglican.ca.

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